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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: IRAN MIDEAST U.S.-EUROPE SERBIA DAVOS
STEINMEIER;BERLIN

- A. Lead Stories Summary
- B. (Iran) Future Of President Ahmadinejad
- C. (Mideast) Peace Process
- D. (U.S.-Europe) Missile Defense System
- E. (Serbia) Parliamentary Elections
- F. (Global Economy) Davos Forum
- G. (Germany) Steinmeier In Trouble

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A. Lead Stories Summary HEADLINES

Prosecutor's Office Proposes Brigitte Mohnhaupt's Release
(Frankfurter Allgemeine)

RAF Terrorist Mohnhaupt To Be Released (Sueddeutsche Zeitung)

Former RAF Terrorist To Be Released (Die Welt)

SPD Demands Tax Increase (Frankfurter Rundschau)

RAF Terrorist Mohnhaupt To be Released In March? (Tagesspiegel)

Mounting Pressure On Steinmeier (Berliner Zeitung)

Editorials focused on the outcome of the Serbian parliamentary elections and on the possible release of the RAF terrorist. ZDF-TV's early evening newscast heute and ARD-TV's early evening newscast Tagesschau opened with reports on the leadership crisis in the CSU.

B. (Iran) Future Of President Ahmadinejad

1. "The Bill For The Iranian President"

Rudolph Chimelli commented in center-left S|ddeutsche Zeitung of Munich (1/23):

"The hunting has begun. Since the failure of the Iranian president has become obvious for everybody, moderate conservatives, reformers, and regime opponents are all turning into critics of Ahmadinejad.... The economy is in bad shape. Never before has Iran been more isolated from the West. American and Israeli military threats arouse fears. Ahmadinejad's most powerful opponent in the regime, former president Rafsanjani, has said weeks ago that he will politically destroy the troublemaker."

2. Center-right Th|ringer Allgemeine of Erfurt (1/23) noted:

"The situation is getting difficult for Teheran. The country, which is rich in oil, knows about its Achilles heal. It is dependent on fuel imports due to a lack of refineries. The support for the mullahs is not so great that they could risk anything to obtain the nuclear bomb. A lengthy parliamentary report warned that the domestic stability could be affected if the West implements an embargo. The risks of military strikes by the U.S. and Israel to

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stop the nuclear program are also difficult to assess. Along with the implementation of the sanctions, the EU is therefore renewing its offer to hold talks. Europe is threatened with getting caught in the middle."

C. (Mideast) Peace Process

1. "Roadmap To Confrontation"

Susanne Knauth opined in leftist die tageszeitung of Berlin (1/23):

"Returning to the roadmap is part of the 'new engagement' in the

Mideast that President Bush talks about. The U.S. wants to restart the unsuccessful peace plan again in early February with a three-party summit. However, there will be no substantial progress with Palestinian President Abbas and Israeli PM Olmert. Abbas does not enjoy the support of the people and of Hamas, which runs the government. The Israeli government is in a crisis. Olmert is involved in a number of corruption scandals and remains unable to act.... And in the Palestinian territories, Fatah and Hamas are getting ready for civil war. The U.S. is pouring over 80 million dollars into Palestinian coffers. The White House apparently favors an internal Palestinian confrontation. During her recent talks in Ramallah, Secretary Rice advised Abbas not to travel to Damascus, where he wanted to meet with Hamas leader Meshal. The most important thing about this meeting was that it took place at all. Realizing the hopelessness of the internal Palestinian conflict, they did not even try to resolve it.... Washington does not just reject Hamas leader Meshal as a negotiating partner, but also the Syrian government, although it could be Syria, above all, that might be able to give the necessary impetus to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. However, the U.S. opposes direct peace negotiations between Damascus and Jerusalem."

2. "Disunited"

Wolfgang Ginter Lerch commented in center-right Frankfurter Allgemeine (1/23):

"The disagreement between Fatah and Hamas over the future policy in the Mideast is too great to be bridged by one meeting between Palestinian President Abbas and Hamas leader Meshal. Meshal, who lives in exile in Damascus, has recently - and apparently as a result of Syrian influence - indicated that Israel could be acknowledged. However, his words were prematurely interpreted, as if he was already behind it.... The most important thing about the meeting between Abbas and Meshal was that it took place because

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Meshal has a great influence on the Hamas leaders in the occupied territories and Gaza. It will take some time until both groups speak the same language and agree on a political strategy."

D. (U.S.-Europe) Missile Defense System

1. "Return To Era Of Arms Race"

Frank Herold noted in left-of-center Berliner Zeitung (1/23):

"The U.S. is serious about establishing parts of its missile defense system in the center of Europe. The Czech Republic - where the people are very skeptical about such plans - is supposed to get the radar system whereas the missiles will be based in Poland.... From a defense policy point of view, this system will remain a question mark. It is completely unsuitable for fighting terrorism, the great challenge of the 21st century. The project must be troubling because of the ideology behind it. In the 1980s and 1990s, there was a consensus that the world will only become a safer place through disarmament and arms control. The Bush plans are a repetition of the illusionary thinking of the 1960s that security can be achieved through arms. Returning to the era of confrontation would be disastrous."

E. (Serbia) Parliamentary Elections

1. Eberhard Nembach commented on regional radio station Norddeutscher Rundfunk of Hamburg (1/23):

"These elections have made nothing easier. The political spheres of influence have not really shifted and problems have not changed at all.... The German presidency should now exert pressure on Serbia to force the political opponents to reach an agreement...but

Brussels must also support those Serbs who really want a new beginning and closer ties to the West. They are the secret winners of these elections. Their representatives in parliament increased their share the most. So something is happening in Serbia, even though only slowly...."

2. "Endurance Test"

Michael Martens opined in a front-page editorial in center-right Frankfurter Allgemeine (1/23):

"It is certainly ugly that Seselj's radical nationalists and the Socialist Party received one-third of the votes, but this is the

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result of democratic elections that took place without any incidents.... But the real endurance test for Serbia's democracy will be the imminent independence of Kosovo. It is well possible that Serbia will pass this test in a better way than Kosovo itself. In Serbia, the excitement about the de facto separation of the province, which in reality happened long ago, is by no means as strong as it appears in the media. The majority of Serbs know that Kosovo would be too much for Serbia's economic and political cohesiveness.... But those who want to support the European forces in Serbia should not slam the door on them. Facilitating travel, at least for students and scientists, could help alleviate the widespread Serbian feeling of isolation "

3. "The Long Path To Europe"

Marc Hoch noted in a editorial in center-left Sueddeutsche Zeitung of Munich (1/23):

"Again Serbia has succumbed to the nationalist temptation. The people have again allowed the radicals to impress them with their empty slogans.... Even in the seventh year after Slobodan Milosevic's ouster, the European forces in the young democracy are still not strong enough.... Even though there are enough votes for the formation of a democratic government, the Serbian nation remains a divided society, split between nationalist convictions and the new European values. This is the first result of Sunday's parliamentary elections....

"The message of these elections with respect to Kosovo is clear: Kosovo remains ours! Even if they had to pay a high price because of their isolation and their backwardness, many Serbs prefer to preserve the nation than to leave it to the Albanians who have the majority in the secessionist region. The vote, and this is the second result of this election, is a signal to the global community not to decide on Kosovo against the will of Serbia.... But further negotiations between Albanians and Serbs are useless. After month-long talks, both parties have not moved an inch. Now UN mediator Athisaari must submit his arbitration, which will, as matters stand, consist of a second Albanian state in Europe. For the Serbs, for their path to Europe, this would not be the worst solution, even though they do not want to accept it yet."

4. Centrist Wiesbadener Kurier (1/23) noted:

"The SRS nationalists remained the strongest party. In no other European country does an extremist group of war criminals achieve one-third of the votes in free elections. Such a Serbia does not fit into the EU. And corresponding EU advances can be justified only by arguing that they are necessary to support Western-oriented forces in the divided country."

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5. Right-of-center M[in]chener Merkur (1/23) noted:

"One thing is certain: Without stability in Serbia, there will be no stability in the Balkans as a whole. But upon closer inspection of the outcome of the parliamentary elections, not too much indicates that there will be stability. It is very likely that the

Europeans will have to live with a highly dangerous trouble spot....

It is currently difficult to set up a government that will have no problems, and an alliance that is able to govern is hardly feasible."

F. (Global Economy) Davos Forum

1. "Germany Gaining Strength"

Joachim Dorfs had this to say in a front-page editorial in business daily Handelsblatt of Duesseldorf (1/23):

"During a time that is longing for leadership something has happened that many people predicted after Merkel's convincing speech in Davos last year: If there is anybody who is able to give [international politics] a fresh impetus, then it is the German chancellor. In contrast to her domestic possibilities, the chancellor has turned into a political 'savior' for many international analysts. As EU and G8 chairwoman, she should set in motion the EU constitutional process and the WTO talks again, and, at the same time she should, in passing, also eliminate hunger in the world.

"Merkel's international position has been strengthened by the surprisingly strong economy at home.... But while the Germans are lamenting, while reform projects or the liberalization of the labor market do not make progress, other countries see us with different eyes. Other countries are investing billions in Germany and former U.S. Treasury Secretary John Snow is even convinced that Germany will again be the engine of growth in Europe. There is no reason to doubt the long-term shift of the balance of forces in the direction of Asian threshold countries such as India and China. But on a short-term, and this is the real surprise, the balance of forces will shift in favor of Germany...."

2. "Entrepreneurs To Davos"

"The "following message should emanate from the meeting in Davos: Everywhere in the world, including in Europe, it is necessary to create greater economic freedom. All national economies would

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benefit from greater individual freedom to conclude contracts and from better access to markets. This is all the more true for developing countries A Gallup opinion poll commissioned by the Global Economic Forum fits the picture. It proves that the people no longer expect the political and economic leaderships to improve the situation in the world. For the people realized long ago that vertical command structures, and thus centralist administrative systems, are disintegrating and are replaced with horizontal communities and communication platforms...."

G. (Germany) Steinmeier In Trouble

1. "A Victim Of The State"

Nicolas Richter judged in an editorial in center-left Sueddeutsche Zeitung of Munich (1/23):

"Foreign Minister Steinmeier and his aides obviously thought that they would never have to justify their contempt for former Guantanamo prisoner Murat Kurnaz. Such thinking can be found among people who frequently take part in secret meetings. These are the same people who question until today the integrity of CIA kidnapping victims such as Khaled el-Masri by using insinuations and false allegations. They know that they stir up widespread resentment among the people towards Muslims who are somehow suspect.

"But rendering a political judgment of Steinmeier will be possible only once he has testified before Bundestag's fact-finding

committee. But he cannot ignore his political responsibility for the scandalous case of Murat Kurnaz. This is a serious problem for a minister who is to call upon other countries to show respect for human rights during his trips abroad. If Steinmeier is unable to remove doubts, he must step down. This may be an untimely moment because of Germany's EU presidency. But it would be more abstruse to imagine that the Kurnaz case would remain without consequences because state interests would require this. An innocent man suffered for five years from a allegedly higher state interest."

2. Right-of-center Badisches Tagblatt of Baden-Baden (1/23) noted:

"All members of the Bundestag's BND fact-finding committee and even the Prosecutor's Office confirmed former Guantanamo prisoner Murat Kurnaz's credibility. This is now creating difficulty for Foreign Minister Steinmeier. The foreign minister should not play for time. He should not hope for the media to lose interest in the case. He should immediately testify before the committee and clearly say what happened. If he cannot be blamed for serious shortcomings he should

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get off lightly. Otherwise, Steinmeier should spare himself, the SPD, and the government any further embarrassments and step down."

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